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ABSTRACT

This fact sheet summarizes evidence on the work status of successful rehabilitations/closures for people with mental retardation in light of the Rehabilitation Act Amendments of 1992, which strengthened the focus of state vocational rehabilitation (VR) programs on community employment outcomes. Data analyzed were drawn from the Rehabilitation Services Administration national data collection system, the RSA-911 database, which contains demographic and employment information on each individual whose case was closed by VR across the nation each year. In 1993, over 25,000 people with mental retardation made up 13.2 percent of all successful VR closures. Comparison of trend data indicated that there was a decrease in successful closures/rehabilitations from 1985 to 1993 and the distribution of successful closures in competitive (83 percent) and sheltered (3 percent) employment remained constant. Comparison of people with mental retardation with others served by VR from 1985 to 1993 indicated that people with MR had a higher rate of sheltered employment closures than all other people closed by VR; the percent of closures into competitive employment increased, especially for people with moderate (68 percent) to severe (50 percent) mental retardation; and, since 1991, more people with severe mental retardation were closed into competitive employment than sheltered employment. Recommendations for increased utilization of competitive employment outcomes are offered. (DB)

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Research ⇒ Practice

Institute for Community Inclusion
• The University Affiliated Program at Children's Hospital & the University of Massachusetts at Boston
• The Center on Promoting Employment (RRTC)

March, 1997

Work Status Trends For People With Mental Retardation

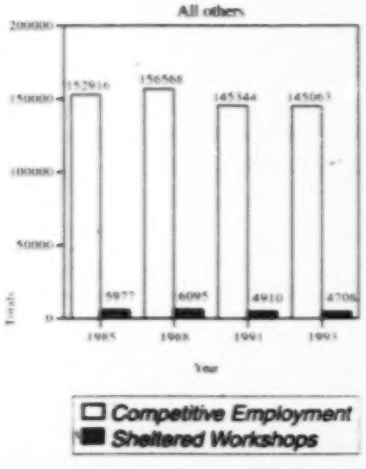
by Dana Scott Gilmore and John Butterworth

Introduction

There is continuing concern about the effectiveness of day and employment services in supporting community employment for people with severe disabilities. These services are funded by several sources including state MR/DD agencies and the federally supported Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) system. Recently the Rehabilitation Act Amendments of 1992 (P.L. 103-73) renewed and strengthened the focus of the state VR programs on community employment as an outcome. This fact sheet will report on the work status of successful rehabilitations/closures for people with mental retardation.

The data for this fact sheet have been compiled from the Rehabilitation Services Administration national data collection system, the RSA-911 database. This database contains demographic and employment information on each individual whose case was closed by VR across the nation each year. Closure may be because the individual became employed (successful closure/rehabilitated), because a determination was made that the person would not become employed through VR services (unsuccessful closure/not rehabilitated) or because the person was found not eligible for services (unsuccessful closure/not accepted for services). The data reflect only cases in which disability was reported.

- In 1993, over 190,000 successful closures represented more than 34% of all VR closures.
- In 1993, over 25,000 people with mental retardation made up 13.2% of all successful VR closures.
- Categories for work status are: competitive labor market, sheltered workshop, self-employed, business enterprise program, homemaker, and unpaid family worker.
- The categories of competitive and sheltered employment represent over 90% of closures for people with mental retardation and will be the outcomes discussed here.
- For comparison, the work status of people with disabilities other than mental retardation (over 168,000 in 1993) will be included.



Results

Work Status For All VR Closures Excluding People With Mental Retardation During FY1985 - 1993:

- There was a decrease in successful closures/rehabilitations from 1985 - 1993.
- The distribution of successful closures in competitive (83%) and sheltered (3%) employment remained constant.
- The total number of closures (successful, not succcessful, not accepted) increased.

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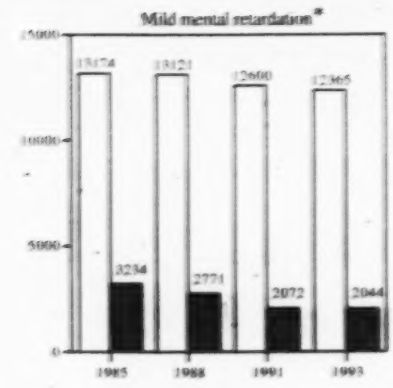

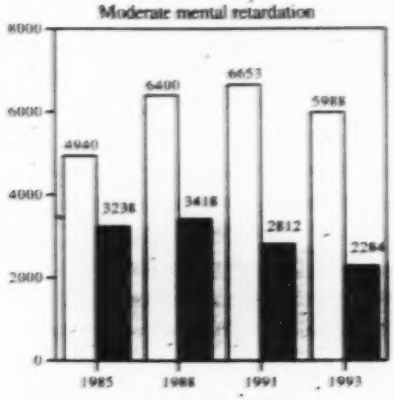

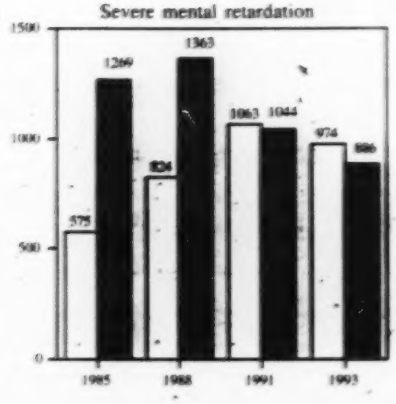

Competitive Employment
Sheltered Workshops

*RSA does not use the 1992 AAMR definition of mental retardation.

For People with Mental Retardation Served by VR During FY1985-1993, for Competitive and Sheltered Workshop Closures:

- People with mental retardation have a higher rate of sheltered employment closures than all other people closed by VR: 13% for people with mild mental retardation up to 45% for people with severe mental retardation.
- Consistent with the total population, there was a decrease in successful closures/rehabilitations from 1985 - 1993.
- The percent of closures into competitive employment increased, especially for people with moderate (68%) to severe (50%) mental retardation.
- Starting in 1991, more people with severe mental retardation were closed into competitive employment than sheltered employment.
- Although the trend toward competitive employment is promising, closure into sheltered employment is still common with over 13% for people with mild mental retardation, 26% for people with moderate mental retardation, and up to 50% for people with severe mental retardation.

Future Challenges

This analysis has shown some positive trends in employment patterns for people with mental retardation, including an increased number of people in competitive jobs and a decreased number of sheltered closures. However, the percentage of people with mental retardation being placed into sheltered workshops is still disproportionate, especially for people with moderate and severe mental retardation. This suggests a continued reliance on sheltered workshops for people with more severe cognitive disabilities.

The data document the potential for increased utilization of competitive employment for people with more severe disabilities. The challenge is implementation of such change. Three areas of change could include: 1) greater access to services in generic systems (e.g., one stop career centers) by developing the systems' capacity to effect successful employment outcomes for people with disabilities; 2) eliminating credit for non-competitive employment as a successful rehabilitation outcome; and 3) expanding consumer choice of programs and control of funding. These challenges can be met with increased efforts toward systemic change. Although this analysis reports a step in the right direction, it acknowledges that there is still a long way to go. A significant increase in conversion from segregated to integrated employment, increased capacity of the community rehabilitation program network, and the development of stronger options for consumer control are essential components to realizing the goal of greater integrated employment options for persons with disabilities served and closed by the public rehabilitation system.

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